EU ELECTIONS 2024:

MANIFESTO

EUROPEAN SEX WORKERS RIGHTS ALLIANCE

Over the past five years, Europe has experienced several crises. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how the most marginalised sex workers are unprotected and fall through the cracks of state welfare systems. The pandemic restrictions and the following digitalisation resulted in a migration towards online sex work, against the backdrop of heated debates on digital policies that harm sex workers in various ways in the EU and the world.

Then came the energy and housing crises, fuelled by the Russian attack on Ukraine and the moral panic over sex trafficking. In this climate, a revision of the directive on trafficking in human beings and a new directive on violence against women were negotiated. The issue of sex work was high on the agenda. We are witnessing the rise of far-right voices calling for the criminalisation of migration. The new Pact on Migration and Asylum is based on racist and xenophobic assumptions. We are also witnessing the growing influence of the anti-gender movement, which seeks to curtail and restrict the rights of women and LGBTQI communities and to keep women in their traditional roles. 'Prostitution' is seen as something that threatens the traditional family and values, and under the guise of combating sex trafficking, new organisations, often supported by American evangelical churches, are forming new alliances with EU governments. In this respect, carceral feminists, who see all sex work as violence against women, are finding a curious convergence with groups they have traditionally disagreed with.

Sex workers' rights have always been a catalyst for our society's understanding of fundamental human rights.

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European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance

European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA)'s EU Election Manifesto calls on the politicians who run for the EU elections to express their support for sex workers' self-determination and the recognition of sex work as work. With women's rights, reproductive rights and gender equality threatened across the European Union and beyond, it is of utmost importance to solidarity with sex workers, who face myriad forms of violence: from structural and institutional to physical and interpersonal. In order to address the systematic oppression sex workers face, we ask all politicians to concentrate their resources on including and amplifying sex workers' voices in policy making on issues that impact the lives of sex workers and to stop promoting legal frameworks that have been proven to be detrimental to sex workers' rights.

European criminal justice systems are often **oppressive**, and therefore **we do not see increased policing, prosecution**, and **imprisonment** as the **solution** to violence against women, trans people and gender inequality.

We believe in transformative justice

that is rooted in supporting and investing in community interventions, long-term organising and mobilisation against the complexity of violence against women and trans people, including economic inequalities, and the lack of accessible social security nets and services.

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European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance

We call on the candidates running for the EU elections to:

1. **Acknowledge sex workers as experts in their own lives and needs.** Feminism has to support women's agency and self-determination over their work and their bodies. Sex workers should be no exceptions.

2. **Respect sex workers' decision to engage in sex work.** As feminists, we reject misogynist statements according to which sex workers "sell their bodies" or "sell themselves": to suggest that sex entails giving away or losing part of yourself is profoundly anti-feminist. People are not diminished by sex. Reject any analysis which holds that sex workers contribute to the "commodification of women, sex or intimacy". We will not blame sex workers for causing harm to other women but patriarchy and other oppressive systems.

3. **Affirm sex workers' ability to claim consent.** To state that it is impossible to consent within sex work takes away from sex workers the ability to name their own boundaries, and the ability to speak out against violence. To propagate the idea that clients "buy" sex workers' bodies or consent – and as such can do what they want to a sex worker – has dangerous real life consequences for sex workers. Furthermore, by positing all sex work as a form of violence, such ideas can lead to a crackdown on sex work in the name of tackling violence – even though crackdowns on sex work actually increase sex workers' vulnerability to violence.

4. **Promote policies and measures that provide real help and support to victims of trafficking, with full respect for the protection of their human and labour rights.** As such, we denounce the conflation of migration, sex work and trafficking. As a result of this conflation, migrant sex workers are particularly targeted by police harassment and raids, detention and deportation, and are pushed into clandestine working environments where they are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

5. **Promote policies that eliminate all forms of violence against sex workers.** Sex work is not a form of sexual violence but sex workers are especially vulnerable to sexual and intimate partner violence due to criminalisation and often intersecting oppressions such as sexism, whorephobia, homophobia and transphobia, racism and classism. Oppression and criminalisation make sex workers vulnerable to violence from individuals, social services, the police, immigration officials, and the judiciary. Regarding sex work as inherently violent and sex workers' consent as invalid serves to normalise violence against them.

6. **Work every day to end misogyny in all spheres of life.** Misogyny, however, is not the cause of sex work, but arises as a response to women's acts and choices, whether that is wearing make-up, having an abortion, or selling sex. We name misogynist sentiments and acts as the problem, and reject calls to change or eliminate behaviours that 'provoke' misogyny. To attempt to eliminate sex work on the grounds that it supposedly provokes misogyny is to agree with those who state that some women's actions – such as selling sex – are intrinsically deserving of misogyny.

7. **Respect migrants' rights.** Migrant women face limited access to work and often little or no access to social security. Some of those seeking refuge sell sexual services out of very limited options to earn their living. The criminalisation of clients and other forms of sex work criminalisation put migrant sex workers under a constant threat of police violence, arrest, and deportation, denying their right to access to justice and redress and other basic human rights, like housing or financial access. The criminalisation of clients removes their income, while offering them no alternatives for survival that aren't precarious and exploitative.

8.

Support LGBT rights. Rejection of LGBT people from their families, obstacles to education and employment in cissexist & heteronormative social structures often result in sex work being one of the very few economic and employment opportunities for LGBT people, especially trans women. Anti-sex work laws do not benefit LGB and trans people as they don't address these complex facets of social marginalisation. This is particularly the case for trans women, as laws that criminalise sex work are particularly used to profile and persecute this group, regardless of whether the person in question is even a sex worker. LGBTQ sex workers' lives and voices are often ignored and invisibilised in public debates which define all prostitution as violence against women. This is particularly damaging towards assigned female at birth non-binary and transmasculine sex workers, as it adds to high levels of misgendering they experience in their daily lives.

Call for full decriminalisation of sex work. There is strong evidence that the Swedish model and all other forms of sex work criminalisation harm sex workers. The Swedish model pushes them into poverty, reduces their power in negotiations with clients, criminalises them for working together for safety, evicts and deports them. By enabling sex workers to organise as workers, decriminalisation decreases sex workers' vulnerability to exploitative labour practices and violence

9.

10.

Speak up against women's increasing precarisation in labour. Historically in Western societies under capitalism and patriarchy, women's work (domestic work, care work, sex work, emotional labour) considered "feminine" have been undervalued, underpaid, or completely rendered invisible and unwaged. Women globally, including sex workers, have jobs that are less well paid & more insecure: they work under exploitative conditions – from criminalised, seasonal or temporary employment to home working, flexible and temp-work, to subcontracting, working as freelancers, or self-employed persons. Sex work has similarities to other types of care work, in that it is mainly associated with women, often migrant or racialised women. Care workers, like sex workers, often do not enjoy the same labour rights as workers in jobs associated with men. Advocating for sex workers' rights therefore has to emphasise their labour rights & needs to address precarious working conditions and exploitation in the sex industry & advocate for legal frameworks that give power to sex workers as workers.

11.

Demand the inclusion of sex workers in the feminist movement. Their inclusion brings invaluable insights, energy, diversity and experience of mobilisation to our movement and challenges our assumptions about gender, class and race. Sex workers were some of the world's first feminists, and our community is diminished without them.

Our vote is the tool to reward and hold accountable those who every four years come to ask for the citizens' vote. Many forget that we sex workers are citizens too. But you remember, and so do we.

FIND OUT HOW TO VOTE!